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Sharing the News:
Journalistic Collaboration as Field Repair

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Organized journalism in every era offers examples of news sharing: cooperative practices by which rival news outlets work together to produce or distribute news. Today, this behavior is being institutionalized by certain emergent news organizations. To understand news sharing, we argue, requires attention to how these journalists seek to not only practice but *repair* the field of journalism. This article analyzes news sharing as a form of field repair, drawing on ethnographic studies of investigative news nonprofits and professional fact-checking groups. We argue that journalism's "high-modern" era, with its broad alignment of economic and professional goals, highlighted competitive rather than collaborative elements of newswork. As that alignment unravels, journalists are engaging in explicit news sharing in pursuit of two intertwined goals: to increase the impact of their own reporting and to build institutional resources for public-affairs journalism to be practiced more widely across the field.

Keywords: public affairs journalism, news nonprofits, fact-checking, collaboration

Introduction

Journalism is usually seen as a competitive occupation, defined by the rivalry among individual reporters and among news organizations. This is not without reason. Journalists guard their sources and stories jealously, sometimes even from peers in the same newsroom. Covering a story first or best brings professional rewards, while being beaten by a rival is a badge of shame for reporter and news outlet alike. Most important, almost all news organizations—even noncommercial ones—depend for their survival on attracting loyal audiences. Given finite audience time and advertiser or donor dollars, they are locked in zero-sum competition with media outlets covering the same region or subject.

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This has never been an adequate picture of the world of news production, however, and it is arguably less so today. Observers have pointed to both mounting economic pressure and new media technologies as driving a "new era of collaboration" (Stearns, 2012, para. 8) in which "reporting is becoming more participatory and collaborative" (Downie & Schudson, 2009, p. 2) in the United States and overseas. Commonly cited examples run from regional content-sharing networks, to long-term partnerships in which newsrooms share resources or operate a joint news brand, to ad hoc collaboration around a particular investigation or subject. One tally counted more than 50 current or recent collaborations involving commercial, nonprofit, and publicly funded outlets in various combinations. These partnerships spanned newspapers, magazines, TV and radio stations, hyperlocal and specialist blogs, investigative newsrooms, and universities (Stearns, 2010).

This collaborative trend is difficult to quantify. The history of journalism includes many and varied forms of cooperation among news organizations, reviewed below. But as important as the trend itself is how journalists seem to be talking about it: the open embrace of "collaborative journalism" as a way to fulfill journalism's mission in the face of profound economic challenges. "It's time to realise that if the wolf is to be kept from the door, collaborative journalism is the way ahead" (Rusbridger, 2009, p. 19) the then-editor of London's *Guardian* has argued. Working together has become "more the rule than the exception," claims the *IRE Journal*, attributing to the Internet's influence the "extraordinary number of collaborations" (Houston, 2010, p. 18) under way to ensure "broader distribution" and "deeper impact" for investigative stories. The *Columbia Journalism Review* flagged the trend this way: "Journalists are creating ways to work with one another, with students, and with the public to sustain journalism's most important contributions to society" ("All Together Now," 2009, para. 1). Working with competitors "has traditionally been anathema to journalists" (ibid.), the article stressed.

What can these initiatives and their accompanying rhetoric tell us about the emerging news ecosystem? What do they reveal about underlying professional norms? This article examines the practices and discourse of what we call "news sharing": deliberate cooperative behaviors involving two or more newsrooms working together to produce and/or distribute news. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork and interviews, we analyze news sharing as practiced and understood by two emergent classes of news organizations gaining attention in the United States and overseas: investigative news nonprofits, which focus on long-term reporting projects, and professional fact-checking groups, which specialize in debunking falsehoods and countering misinformation.

Journalists in these small, specialized outlets rely on outside news organizations to a remarkable degree in their daily work. In various ways we document, they have loosened the reins of ownership both editorially and commercially to accomplish a wider journalistic mission. Specifically, we find that they deploy news sharing in two related ways: to increase the spread and impact of their own reporting and to build institutional resources for their style of reporting to be practiced more widely. Collaborative activity in journalism can be seen as part of a broad shift toward networked organizational forms across the landscape of political communications, much studied in the worlds of campaigns and activism. But to understand news sharing by investigative nonprofits and professional fact-checkers, we argue, requires attention to their explicit mission of journalistic reform—to the ways they seek to not only practice but *repair* the field of journalism.

News Sharing as Journalistic Field Repair

In advancing the notion of "field repair," we mean field first of all in the common sense of an area recognized by practitioners and outsiders as comprising an at least loosely defined set of shared skills and values. Fields in this sense include areas such as politics, higher education, and journalism. The field of journalism is broad and encompasses specialties—sports journalism, entertainment news, political reporting, and so on—with distinct occupational cultures and codes of behavior. But the field also has a clear center in the journalistic imagination: the serious public affairs reporting that builds professional status, wins prestigious awards, and is seen to fulfill the press's Fourth Estate role in what Gans (2003) calls "journalism's theory of democracy" (p. 55).

Both investigative news nonprofits and professional fact-checking groups address that perceived center of the journalistic field. Both understand themselves as practicing the kind of "accountability journalism" that is vital to a well-functioning democracy, and see their work as responding to an ongoing crisis in journalism. For the growing group of investigative nonprofits, this crisis is the well-documented threat to watchdog reporting posed by falling profits, shrinking newsrooms, and failing newspapers (Downie & Schudson, 2009; Project for Excellence in Journalism, 2013).[2] The fact-checkers, meanwhile, are responding to a perceived rise in political misinformation, brought on by the fragmentation and politicization of the news media and the corresponding loss of objective journalism's gatekeeper status (e.g., Jackson & Jamieson, 2007). These economic and professional challenges to journalism are often seen as facets of a single crisis (Siles & Boczkowski, 2012). Field repair in this broad sense consists of self-conscious efforts to respond to the ongoing crisis in journalism—directly, by providing the kinds of public affairs coverage seen to be lacking, and indirectly, through institution-building meant to promote such coverage in the news industry as a whole.

The concept of field repair draws on the specific sociological sense of fields (or institutions) as meso-level spheres of action that exist between the individual or organization and the wider society; that are at least partly autonomous; and that are governed by a particular internal order or logic necessary to fully account for the actions of individuals in the field (Bourdieu, 1993; Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; DiMaggio & Powell, 1991; Martin, 2003). As Benson (2006) notes, parallel but contrasting conceptions of a semi-autonomous journalistic field have emerged from Pierre Bourdieu's work (Benson, 2004, 2005; Bourdieu, 1998, 2005) and from American "new institutionalist" authors (Cook, 1998, 2006; Sparrow, 1999, 2006). These formulations differ most sharply in their account of the internal workings of the journalistic field, with institutionalists emphasizing homogeneity and stability. Two features of Bourdieusian field theory make it especially relevant here. One is the stress on fields as sites of struggle characterized by the ongoing production of difference. This allows for the possibility of contestation and transformation—a point developed by later scholars in the context of news production (Benson, 2006) and more generally (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011). Another is Bourdieu's focus on the distinction between economic and cultural capital (Benson, 2006; Bourdieu, 1993, 1998). As we shall see, this becomes a useful lens for understanding news sharing as a strategy for field repair in light of journalism's economic crisis.

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[2] Although CPI predates the financial crisis, the organization sees itself as leading a wave of nonprofits born of that crisis.

Field repair depends upon the *self-conscious* orientation to a common occupational domain that underlies field theory. A field is understood as such not just by the analyst but by individuals and organizations inhabiting it, who "interact with knowledge of one another under a set of common understandings about the purposes of the field, the relationships in the field . . . and the field's rules" (Fligstein & McAdam, 2011, p. 3). This is not to say participants are aware of every way they experience or exert influence—as Benson (2006) writes, fields are "arenas of struggle in which individuals and organizations compete, unconsciously and consciously, to valorize those forms of capital which they possess" (p. 190)—but only that they have a view of the field and this shapes their participation in it. This awareness is closely tied to a field's autonomy, whereby participants may self-consciously adhere to its internal logic (e.g., professional norms) in defiance of outside pressures. An example in journalism would be reporters not voting despite norms of citizenship or accepting a loss in pay to move to a high-status news outlet. Both investigative reporting and fact-checking are genres that assert the autonomy of the journalistic field as against the adjacent political and economic fields.

Reflexive awareness is also the basis for contestation within the field—for position or status but also, sometimes, over the rules that dictate position or confer status. With their "strategic action fields," Fligstein and McAdam (2011) attempt a sort of unified theory of field-centered approaches; usefully for this discussion they highlight internal contention not just by individuals but by "collective actors who work to build and then hold their groups together in the face of struggle in a broader field" (p. 20). The history of journalism offers many examples of reporters joining under the banner of professional movements: interpretive journalism, precision journalism, public journalism, and so on. Reporters and editors constantly debate the norms of their field at conferences and in journalism reviews. One such discussion informing the work of investigative nonprofits and professional fact-checkers is the field's internal critique of "he said, she said" accounts, which fail to adjudicate factual disputes (e.g., Cunningham, 2003).

Field repair describes a particular kind of contestation within an occupational field. These are efforts to address a fundamental failure of or threat to the shared endeavor—efforts that may appeal to long-standing values but proceed by practicing and promoting new approaches. It stands in contrast to what scholars have called *paradigm repair* (Bennett, Gressett, & Haltom, 1985; Reese, 1990). Although both reflect a restorative impulse, paradigm repair describes attempts to "normalize" stories or actors that expose contradictions in journalism's professional ideology, marking them as deviant. Field repair does the opposite: It highlights journalistic failure in order to ratify new alternatives. The concept overlaps with what Carlson (2012) calls "second-order paradigm repair" (p. 268) whereby reporters "confront rather than dismiss" (ibid.) challenges to the profession (for instance, by highlighting the collapse of decades-old newspapers to rally a defense of the reigning commercial-professional paradigm). Field repair is more expressly reformist, however. It seeks to protect journalism by *changing* it, legitimizing new approaches to or definitions of professional, objective reporting. It draws on the critical, meta-journalistic discourse that Zelizer (1993) sees as helping to "build authority for practices not emphasized by traditional views of journalism" (p. 224).

Examples of this reformist impulse are as old as the objectivity norm itself, which provoked calls for more assertive, interpretive reporting even as it became entrenched (Schudson, 2001; Zelizer, 1993). The clearest recent example of field repair may be the "public" or "civic" journalism movement of the 1990s, which argued for closer journalistic engagement in the democratic life of local communities (Rosen, 1999). The sometimes controversial measures designed to achieve a civically responsive and responsible journalism included public meetings between reporters and citizens to identify civic concerns that would directly inform the news agenda. This is why the concept of field repair is useful: It draws attention to practices—like those public meetings, and like news sharing today—that challenge assumptions, expose tensions or contradictions, and unsettle previously stable arrangements in a field.

The History of News Sharing

This article documents a particular set of news-sharing practices by specialized outlets occupying well-defined niches in the news ecosystem. Investigative nonprofits and dedicated fact-checkers cooperate openly with one another and with traditional newsrooms by sharing content, resources, and methods under the banner of journalistic reform. It is important to note, however, that these sharing practices fit into a longer, sometimes subterranean history of collaboration in the news. Every era of journalism features forms of competition and cooperation; the professional and economic logic of news in the last century made the former more visible than the latter.

The earliest newspapers in Europe and the United States borrowed freely and reciprocally from one another, with paragraphs of text migrating from paper to paper (Slauter, 2012). This form of direct news sharing persisted into the 19th century, supported by various commercial and legal mechanisms. In Europe, local papers sometimes shared the cost of subscribing to a foreign gazette (Slauter, 2008); in colonial and early America, sharing was aided by the custom, codified in the Post Office Act 1792, of allowing printers to exchange newspapers free of charge (Slauter, 2012; Steffen, 2003).

In the United States, reporting emerged as a distinct occupation in the 19th century (Schudson, 1978, 2001). As publishers lost direct party ties and as the advertising market grew, mass-market dailies increasingly competed for readership on the basis of reporting. From the 1830s on, Schudson (2003) writes, "Competition for news grew intense" (p. 72). But publishers also found ways to cooperate to ease the newsgathering burden. In the 1820s, one association of newspapers shared the costs of running a boat to retrieve news from ships coming into New York Harbor (Schudson, 1978). More famously, publishers cooperated to create wire services such as the Associated Press (Starr, 2004). Similar cooperative dynamics could be seen in Victorian England, where reporters for competing papers worked together in note-taking and newsgathering (Tunstall, 1971).

Competition for news has been an elemental feature of the institutionalized, objective journalism of the 20th century, basic to production routines and to the self-understanding of news professionals. Reporters compete not only for "scoops" (more rare than popular accounts might suggest) but for good sources, colorful details, thorough coverage, interesting angles and so on. They closely monitor one another's work in the struggle for field-specific forms of capital—that is, for status in the newsroom and the profession (Darnton, 1975; Gans, 2004). News outlets also compete for audiences and for the subscription and advertising revenue these bring. A defining feature of the "high-modern" moment (Hallin, 1992) in American journalism was that these two competitive goals—economic and professional success—seemed to be well aligned. The tension between them faded into the background in profitable midcentury newsrooms, before the political and economic rifts that grew from the 1970s on. As Hallin (1992) writes, "prosperity meant that the 'profane,' commercial side of the news organization, didn't have to conflict with its 'sacred,' public-service side" (p. 15).

At the same time, various forms of cooperation have characterized the era of professional, objective journalism. This is clearest in beat reporting. Journalists covering the same government agency or campaign have long relied on tacit mechanisms and more formal arrangements, such as pool reports, to share resources and manage competition (Breed, 1952; Crouse, 1973). As Darnton (1975) writes, "nothing could be less competitive than a group of reporters on the same story" (p. 184); he described reporters in the same police pressroom sharing research duties, dictating details to one another, and taking care never to scoop the competition. Dunwoody (1980) similarly found science reporters at prestige, agenda-setting news outlets "emphasizing *cooperative* behaviors among reporters in situations that should be highly *competitive*" (p. 14). In a more general way, news organizations continually draw on one another's work for editorial cues, story ideas, and the facts and context that inform every developing story. It is not difficult to see what has been called "routine reliance on other media" (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996, p. 122) as a form of tacit cooperation (see also Boczkowski, 2010; Reinemann, 2004). Reporters depend on their rivals and know that their rivals depend on them, even if they rarely acknowledge this in print.

In other words, professional American journalism of the 20th century tended to celebrate its competitive features and obscure its collaborative ones. This is, we argue, a basic feature of the particular historical settlement between journalism's business-commercial and democratic-professional impulses that characterizes the Liberal Anglo-American tradition (Hallin & Mancini, 2004), which in the United States reached its apotheosis in the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s (Hallin, 1992). In Bourdieusian terms, the Liberal model has been one in which economic and cultural capital within journalism are mostly aligned, both for individual reporters and for news organizations. This alignment required routine sharing and collaboration to remain in the background, mostly unacknowledged. Tunstall (1971) observed of journalistic "competitor-colleagues" on both sides of the Atlantic that group norms strongly supported cooperation—as well as being "secretive" about it since "disapproval by outsiders is to be expected" (p. 220).

That historical settlement has been coming undone in the United States for several decades (Ryfe, 2012). The economic crisis in journalism brings into sharp relief the tension between the field's commercial orientation and its democratic mission, creating the professional context for more explicit news sharing. It is important not to overstate the case: Journalism remains a competitive occupation. The outlets we observe here promote themselves and their work avidly. There are strategic, instrumental reasons for small, specialized outlets to embrace collaboration. Nevertheless, these journalists understand and justify news sharing in light of their reformist mission. And their success in establishing cooperative niches in today's news ecology reflects a gradual, ongoing shift of norms across the field.

Method and Findings

We observed news-sharing practices in two types of organizations: investigative news nonprofits and fact-checking groups. The analysis of news nonprofits is based primarily on fieldwork conducted from 2011 to 2013 with two organizations, the Center for Public Integrity (CPI) and the Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism (WCIJ). Research at CPI spanned approximately 170 hours of participant observation at its Washington, DC, headquarters as well as 18 in-depth interviews and many more informal interviews; at WCIJ's office at the University of Wisconsin, observations and interviews were gathered over several years. The analysis of professional fact-checkers draws on fieldwork conducted between 2010 and 2014 with the two best-known national fact-checking groups, FactCheck.org and PolitiFact. This included more than 200 hours of participant observation in the newsroom and in training sessions, conferences, and other public and private meetings dedicated to the movement.

Our analysis begins with news nonprofits and proceeds to fact-checking groups. Each case presents observations of two primary forms of news sharing: collaborative practices in which journalists from different organizations work together in their reporting; and distributional practices, meaning arrangements to promote their stories through other news outlets. We also identify a third category that combines elements of collaboration and distribution: efforts by these journalists to be quoted or cited authoritatively by their peers. It should be stressed these categories are not exclusive and serve mainly to organize behaviors that in reality are fluid and overlapping.

The News Nonprofits

The nonprofit news organizations examined here belong to a growing professional movement supported by a philanthropic sector focused on the crisis in journalism. The journalists starting these organizations are building what they see as a parallel, independent news production system in response to the perceived failure of commercial news outlets. They believe the nonprofit model offers a needed supplement to fulfill journalism's social mission (Konieczna, 2014). Working closely with traditional news outlets to produce and distribute investigative stories helps boost the impact of those stories and points to a desire to change the culture of mainstream journalism from within.

Nonprofit news organizations have multiplied rapidly since the crisis in commercial journalism became acute in 2008. Their professional association, the Investigative News Network, now has more than 90 members. The Center for Public Integrity is one of the largest and oldest, founded in 1989 by Charles Lewis, a former television news producer concerned that American journalists were not "asking the hard questions" of those in power. As noted below, CPI initially promoted itself as a research organization, not a newsroom. Beginning in the 1990s and especially over the last decade, however, the group has operated and presented itself as a news organization—one that publishes its own stories online but also gives them away to other news outlets.

The Wisconsin Center for Investigative Journalism belongs to the group of newer, smaller investigative news nonprofits. Its founder launched the site in 2009 after the newspaper he worked for closed its investigative desk. The center is based at the University of Wisconsin, and, like CPI, it plays a key role among nonprofit news organizations, presenting at conferences and sharing the skills of its staffers. Both organizations collaborate with and distribute through other news organizations, though WCIJ focuses mainly on the state of Wisconsin. Both also rely for their funding largely on foundations, with some support from philanthropists and readers.

Collaboration

At both CPI and WCIJ, collaborating directly with other news organizations is a part of daily newsroom operations. Joint investigations are seen to provide depth and scale that none of the partners could match on their own, and to allow the nonprofits to build expertise in specialized areas that can be shared with conventional outlets. (For instance, WCIJ has developed expertise in mapping, while CPI has hired programmers and database experts for data-driven features.) Both organizations have developed an ethic that celebrates collaboration as superior to traditional arrangements.

In 2013, CPI's international arm, the International Consortium of Investigative Journalists, organized one of the largest newsroom collaborations ever, bringing together more than 100 journalists from more than 50 countries to write about the issue of offshore tax havens. The data involved came from around the world, and staff argued that the project's success hinged on being able to coordinate the work of individual reporters who had the relevant cultural context. The organization tried to enforce an ethic of "true" collaboration, insisting that participating reporters work together to analyze the data rather than simply dividing it up; it even turned down a very prominent U.S. newspaper whose editors preferred to work on the data alone (Konieczna, 2014). This strong desire to work collaboratively rather than competitively points to the organization's self-conscious embrace of new journalistic values.

WCIJ also engages routinely in such collaborative projects, with a similar rationale. In a 2012 investigation, for instance, center staff worked with reporters from the *La Crosse Tribune* and student interns to analyze a year's worth of the Wisconsin governor's calendars. A small news story had already been written by a leading daily about the data. In contrast, WCIJ's collaborative, project-based approach permitted a detailed analysis based on coding calendar entries into a searchable database of more than 4,000 events—a deeper analysis than any single organization could have produced, editors argued. The result was a package of investigative stories shared with news organizations around the state.

Distribution

Giving stories away to other news organizations enables nonprofit newsrooms to increase the perceived impact of their investigative reporting. This is one way to satisfy foundations that want to see measurable results, but it also offers a visible sign of their influence in helping to improve journalism as a whole. News nonprofits fall on a spectrum between those that seek to maximize their own readership and those that distribute mainly through other media outlets. All of them, however, understand news audiences in a way sharply at odds with commercial news outlets.

CPI has endeavored to build its own profile as a news destination. It updates its website daily, carefully tracking its readers—and attempting to draw new ones—just as commercial newsrooms do. At the same time, CPI pays close attention a wider audience. It asks media outlets that carry its stories to track readership on its behalf, whenever possible via a special bit of HTML code embedded in the article. A screen in the center's office shows the total readership of each story, adding together CPI's traffic and that to partner sites; all readers are valued, however they encounter the center's work, because every additional click represents success in the organization's mission of spreading its work as broadly as possible. The idea of journalistic impact is central to how CPI understands its relationships with media partners: "Our biggest audience is not probably our own website; we think where can it go and how can it have impact" (Konieczna, 2014, p. 115), the executive director explained in a staff meeting.

WCIJ relies even more on this type of news sharing. Though the center does maintain a website, the bulk of its audience comes through organizations that republish its stories. Staff demonstrate a daily awareness of this fact, rarely drawing attention to direct readership and instead meticulously tracking "pickups" by other news outlets. WCIJ pushes its new and upcoming stories out to news organizations via a large e-mail list; it also shares story budgets with public broadcasters and with newspapers in one of Wisconsin's major chains.

The history of CPI underscores how shifts in the media environment have promoted news sharing. From the outset, the group's explicit mission has been to improve journalism by getting hard-hitting investigative stories into the news. This meant, in the early days, that center staff could not call themselves journalists—because reporters would not report on the work of other journalists. In 1994, though, the center started publishing a newsletter, which soon won a journalism award. Its second book was serialized and syndicated by The New York Times News Service. Its founder began writing for the journal of an association of investigative reporters, and started hiring former journalists. Meanwhile, journalistic norms in regard to reporting on or republishing work that appeared elsewhere have become more permissive, especially over the last decade. The evolution in the center's self-conception—from think tank to news organization—reflects a wider shift in the media ecosystem and newsroom culture.

Being Cited

A third form of news sharing consists of efforts to appear as sources in, or be cited by, other news organizations. Being mentioned by other news outlets, especially prestigious ones, helps to build the profile of news nonprofits. But at both CPI and WCIJ, it was also seen as a way of promoting and shaping important stories. Staffers dedicate substantial effort to promoting and tracking the pickup of their work across the media. When *The New York Times* referred to a CPI story without mentioning the center, one staffer said that "It's a nice backhanded complement, which is the way the media works" (Konieczna, 2014, p. 111). This seems to reflect CPI's broader attitude: Getting the story out is the bigger goal, a goal encouraged by foundations that want to see evidence that their support makes a difference. At WCIJ, the distinction between having articles republished or merely cited sometimes disappeared altogether; both were seen as ways to boost the impact of the center's reporting. Staffers applauded at meetings upon hearing the number of local organizations that carried a particular story, and they posted stories reprinted in local media on the wall outside the center's office.

The Fact-Checkers

What a recent report called the "global boom in political fact-checking" revolves around a very specific mission: to hold public figures accountable for false or misleading claims (Kessler, 2014). Unlike traditional, internal fact-checking designed to correct errors before publication, the new genre publicly challenges political lies and exaggerations (Graves & Glaisyer, 2012). Reporters who specialize in this kind of journalism increasingly have their own conferences, professional networks, mailing lists, and best practices. They meet often and defend one another in moments of controversy, forming a self-described movement within the profession—"ink-stained fact-checkers," as one declared at the first fact-checking conference, in 2007. Fact-checkers often describe their movement as a response to the failures of the U.S.

press before the 2003 invasion of Iraq, or to a broader sense that political journalism "had strayed away from the truth-seeking tradition" (Dobbs, 2012, p. 3). A shared critique of "he said, she said" accounts and superficial "horse race" coverage surfaces continually among these reporters—in office conversation, in training sessions, in internal literature, in conferences, and sometimes in broad public remarks (Graves, 2013).

The fact-checking movement includes commercial newsrooms (like *The Washington Post*) as well as nonprofit groups. Increasingly, it also includes news outlets in Europe—with more than three dozen established fact-checkers—and in Asia, Africa, and South America. The discussion below focuses on two leading national fact-checking organizations in the United States. FactCheck.org was founded in 2003 by a former CNN and *Wall Street Journal* reporter who has been called the father of the modern fact-checking movement. Based at the University of Pennsylvania, the nonprofit organization is supported entirely by foundations and reader donations. PolitiFact was launched in 2007 as an independent, Washington-based unit of the *Tampa Bay Times*, a commercial newspaper owned by the nonprofit Poynter Foundation. The site carries advertising, and some of its content runs in the print editions of the *Times*, supported by subscribers and advertisers. However, as part of a movement that draws intense philanthropic interest, PolitiFact has sought foundation support and in 2013 secured a $625,000 grant to launch a site focused on fact-checking political pundits (Brown, 2013).

Since 2010, PolitiFact has also licensed its brand and methodology to state-level news organizations across the country. Today the PolitiFact network comprises nine active state franchises, whose fact-checks reside in the same master database at politifact.com. Franchisees pay an initial fee of approximately $30,000 and annual renewals of $10,000. In exchange, they receive ad revenue from their state page at politifact.com as well as the exclusive right to reproduce or syndicate PolitiFact articles in their state (Graves, 2013). This unusual revenue model cannot be understood solely in commercial terms, however: as discussed below, it has never been expected to yield a profit.

Collaboration

Fact-checkers in the United States and overseas have occasionally united in joint efforts to cover a major event, such as a 2014 "factcheckathon" around the G20 summit. They actively promote one another on Twitter and via features such as PolitiFact's "Beyond the Truth-O-Meter," a permanent feed of outside fact-checks. Most important, fact-checkers constantly cite and build on one another's work, defying the traditional journalistic reluctance to acknowledge a rival's stories. (As of October 2013, for instance, PolitiFact and FactCheck.org had each cited the other more than 100 times as an authoritative reference in their own published articles.) The shared mission of fact-checking eases the pressure to be first on a story, and these journalists overlap tremendously in the claims they investigate. As the resident fact-checker for *The Washington Post* has explained, "That's the nature [of fact-checking]. It doesn't really matter that they've done it before and I haven't" (Graves, 2013, p. 156).

On the contrary, elite fact-checking outlets almost always reach the same substantive conclusion about claims they assess (Amazeen, 2015). Consensus helps to validate their claim to be objective, and fact-checkers admit that disagreements cause discomfort. An editor's letter at PolitiFact acknowledged this after revising a ruling to bring it more in line with competitors: "It was a disconcerting schism for us. It's much more satisfying when the major fact-checking organizations agree, because we know we've reached the same conclusions independently" (Graves, 2013, p. 149). The fact-checkers are rivals joined in building a movement, a shared project that blunts competitive aspects of their work and promotes collaboration and mutual support. Though these organizations differ in some substantial ways—for instance, FactCheck.org rejects the rating systems deployed by rivals like PolitiFact and the Fact Checker—they often praise one another's work. Fact-checking invites constant criticism from politicians, media critics, and other journalists, and practitioners frequently publish editor's notes and give interviews defending one another. "Fact checkers are under assault!" (Graves, 2013, p. 217) wrote *The Washington Post*'s Fact Checker after one explosive controversy.

More direct collaboration takes place among the newsrooms in PolitiFact's network of state franchises. The unusual relationship begins with a three-day training session in which journalists from the state-level news outlet—often veteran political reporters—learn the PolitiFact method. For several weeks, partner sites remain under direct supervision of PolitiFact National. They have to undergo supplemental training if their work does not meet PolitiFact standards, and national editors periodically issue new guidance on particular fact-checking issues. Although the goal is for franchises to operate independently, PolitiFact's top editors are keepers of the journalistic brand and arbiters of what makes a fair, accurate, and newsworthy Truth-O-Meter item (Graves, 2013).

The franchise model thus subjects reporters to the editorial oversight of journalists in another newsroom, in a distant city, employed by a different company. PolitiFact's ultimate product is a collaborative database of Truth-O-Meter verdicts, which now spans the work of more than a dozen independent news organizations. Fact-checkers make sense of this project and the unusual lines of authority it demands in the context of their mission to fix political journalism, a theme echoed in negotiations with partners, in training sessions, and even in the official training manual, which invites reporters to practice a "gutsy form of reporting" and declares that "the bar is higher for PolitiFact stories" (Graves, 2013, p. 252).

Distribution

Like investigative nonprofits, some fact-checkers distribute their work freely to other news organizations. The nonprofit FactCheck.org invites any media outlet to reproduce its articles without charge, asking only to be appropriately credited and that editorial integrity be preserved. (Among other outlets, *USA Toda*y and the Huffington Post frequently reprint the group's work.) This free sharing jibes with FactCheck.org's nonprofit status but is understood as part of the mission to spread the gospel of fact-checking as widely as possible across the field. "Being stolen or plagiarized is fine with us" (Graves, 2013, p. 260), the director has declared.

As a commercial news organization, PolitiFact does not give its articles away; state franchises pay for the exclusive right to use or syndicate PolitiFact content in their state. However, this franchise model only makes sense in light of the larger reformist mission of the fact-checking movement. PolitiFact acknowledges openly that the "modest amount of revenue" from state partnerships will never yield a profit. Instead, as the founder explained in an interview (Myers, 2010) when the first franchise launched, "this is a public service play" (para. 36); the benefit is that "a broader audience gets exposed to PolitiFact" (para. 17) and more politicians will have to “face the Truth-O-Meter” (para. 28). Again, that reformist mission pervades every aspect of the relationship with franchises; it is how partners are convinced to pay a fee to expand into a costly, time-intensive form of news at a moment of constrained resources. PolitiFact reporters from across the country celebrate their shared mission each year at a gathering called PolitiFact Palooza (where in 2011 they devised an anthem sung to the tune of the Doors’ “Light My Fire”). The franchise model serves to increase the influence of PolitiFact’s work and to promote a broader culture of fact-checking in journalism (Graves, 2013).

Being Cited

The most powerful way to amplify the influence of fact-checking, however, is by providing the raw material for stories in other media outlets. The fact-checkers at FactCheck.org, PolitiFact, and similar groups pay close attention to references to their work in mainstream venues from *The New York Times* to *The Daily Show*. They highlight these media hits in internal conversation, in public appearances, and often with a special editor’s note—for instance, after Jon Stewart cited 21 Truth-O-Meter items in a segment mocking Fox News (Graves, 2013). A clear sign of the importance placed on being cited and quoted by other journalists is the effort that goes into media interviews—top editors give scores or even hundreds of on-air interviews in an election season—and into managing their extensive networks of media partnerships with print and broadcast newsrooms (Graves, 2013). Media attention helps to draw bigger audiences and greater professional recognition. But it also shows the acceptance of fact-checking as a legitimate form of journalism and offers evidence—for these organizations as well as their funders—that it can have a meaningful impact on public affairs.

Discussion

In understanding news sharing as a form of field repair, we have underscored that these openly cooperative practices, so uncomfortable in the past, make sense to journalists who engage in them as part of an explicit mission to improve or even save journalism. Investigative nonprofits and fact-checking sites do not have identical missions. The former seek to promote the watchdog coverage the profession already values, but which they feel has been in decline for decades and is under particular threat today. The latter have sought professional recognition and acceptance for a controversial style of news meant to revitalize the truth-seeking mission of journalism. However, both projects reflect a critique of conventional political reporting that simply transmits official claims. And both appeal to the democratic mission of journalism, highlighting ways news organizations must work together to address the field’s failures and face its threats.

We do not suggest that the news sharing practices described here are selfless, nor free of competitive tension. Other scholars have stressed challenges involved when reporters work together across organizational lines; for instance, Anderson (2013) describes the largely failed effort to integrate Philadelphia’s two major dailies, pushed together by their parent company. This highlights a crucial feature of our cases: They involve small, specialized newsrooms that complement, rather than compete with, general-interest news outlets. And even so, tensions surface in all of these collaborations. A good example came in an acrimonious debate between CPI and ABC News after the nonprofit won a Pulitzer Prize for a project both were involved in: ABC argued the award ought to be shared, while CPI insisted

ABC's role was mainly as a "megaphone." Similarly, journalistic and financial tensions have led several PolitiFact franchisees to defect. In 2014, for instance, the *The Plain Dealer* (Cleveland) publicly rejected the Truth-O-Meter methodology to launch its own fact-checking system. Such failures remind us that collaboration is not easy—and underscore the relative success these journalistic reformers have had in convincing their peers to join forces.

What accounts for the more routine and more open collaboration described here? One answer begins with technological change and its effect on the organizational landscape of political communications. By this argument, newsrooms are adapting in characteristic ways to the affordances of a media environment in which "communication is not necessarily as costly, difficult, time consuming, or limited by the cognitive constraints of individuals as it once was" (Bimber, Flanagin, & Stohl, 2005, p. 366). A burgeoning literature addresses how the so-called network public sphere (Benkler, 2006) invites more informal or ad hoc coordination among smaller and less hierarchical organizations, in political campaigns, social movements, and so on (e.g., Bennett & Segerberg, 2013). A network perspective underscores the link between greater specialization and enhanced collaboration, a complementarity evident in the cases studied here. Neither dedicated fact-checkers nor investigative news nonprofits could operate in the ways we describe outside of the contemporary information environment (and, indeed, CPI operated very differently in the media system of the 1980s and 1990s).

At the same time, however, the journalistic mission of these emergent news organizations structures and orients their collaborations at every level. Put simply, the interorganizational *networks* cohere only in the context of the professional *field*, a point Kreiss (2012) makes with regard to networked, "post-bureaucratic" political campaigns. The notion of field repair highlights the *self-conscious* orientation to the field and its perceived faults or needs that structure these activities. Thus, the fact that today CPI can work with even prestige news outlets clearly reflects shifting professional norms: A shared discourse about the shortage of investigative journalism helps ease the competitive tensions that emerge in such collaborations and further normalize and valorize news sharing. Similarly, PolitiFact approaches potential state partners with a financially and journalistically demanding proposal that only makes sense as part of an appeal to improve political reporting. Field-level concerns about journalistic status and integrity deeply influence which news outlets both fact-checkers and nonprofits will cite, partner with, and even give interviews to. Likewise, their shared mission drives ostensible rivals like PolitiFact and FactCheck.org to cite and support one another's work. The resulting networks visibly embody the logic of the field—for instance, in reflecting and reproducing the status of particular news organizations. But they also embody, and incrementally ratify, shifts in the norms that inform the behavior of journalists day to day.

Another tempting way to explain news sharing is in economic terms, by pointing to the nonprofit model some organizations have embraced in response to the economic crisis. Through the 20th century, subsidies supported public affairs journalism as a by-product of profitable media activities. Those subsidies came, for instance, from families who owned newspapers and were eager for prestige and political influence; from a regulatory regime that compelled broadcasters to produce public-interest programming; and from the bundled economics of newspaper publishing, which meant that readers who wanted a sports score or crossword puzzle were supporting public affairs coverage (Hamilton, 2004). Those subsidies have vanished. Nonprofit news organizations such as CPI and FactCheck.org arguably lay bare a market failure in journalism, making philanthropic appeals to directly subsidize unprofitable kinds of news.

An economic analysis might hold that because nonprofits do not seek to monetize their work directly, they can afford to give it away. Ownership no longer matters. However, our cases highlight how this shift in economic behavior is embedded in a professional logic tied to journalism's democratic mission, and how it makes salient cooperative tendencies that have always existed in the field. Against the backdrop of a well-developed discourse about threats to public affairs reporting, these organizations see the extent to which other news outlets work with them, or even "steal" from them, as measures of success. They pay close attention to their footprint across the media ecosystem and have metrics that effectively lay claim to audiences visiting other news outlets. Just as important, it takes two (at least) to share. The ability of investigative nonprofits and fact-checking sites to work with traditional news outlets depends on the willingness of journalists in those organizations to loosen editorial control; it reflects a wider cultural turn within the field that has accompanied technological and economic shifts. This also raises the important question of how journalistic collaboration is practiced and understood by reporters in different media systems—for instance, with a stronger tradition of government support for journalism.

Crucially, the culture of news sharing has been reinforced by journalism's increasing engagement with the philanthropic world. Among U.S. news nonprofits, 501(c)(3) is more than a tax status; it sustains a group identity based on the commitment to provide the public affairs journalism most at risk. Further, the need to appeal to foundations and demonstrate effectiveness in democratic terms encourages journalists to highlight their influence on and through other news outlets. This philanthropic engagement acts as a crucible, we believe, for public rhetoric from journalists that celebrates news sharing and posits it as a response to the industry crisis. Again, this influence is not limited to nonprofits. PolitiFact and *The Washington Post*'s Fact Checker, both commercial operations, have taken advantage of philanthropic interest in fact-checking to expand into new areas and distribute their work in new ways. This has required them to talk about their work differently. For instance, PolitiFact sharpened its rhetoric of democratic impact to secure foundation support for a project "to improve the caliber of our national discourse" (Brown, 2013, para. 8), a framing professional fact-checkers have previously rejected as inappropriate for objective journalists (Graves, 2013). How will the data and discourse around such foundation-funded ventures affect the way these journalists understand and present themselves in the future?

Seen through the lens of field repair, the practices and discourse of news sharing shed light on a particular sort of professional struggle: contests not just within but *about* a field, by actors who seek to legitimize new approaches and new ways of thinking about their work, as necessary to protect the autonomy and integrity of the field as a whole. Field repair reminds us of the connection between critical discourse and everyday practice that is vital to understanding a field like journalism—never more so than in moments of perceived crisis. The emergent news organizations studied in this article have very specialized missions, and justify their news sharing within an open agenda of journalistic reform. The interesting question becomes how similar shifts in rhetoric and practice are visible in many different kinds of newsrooms, large and small, and whether these point to a realignment of cultural capital in the journalistic field as a whole.

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